

# University of Texas



Bill Little commentary: Remembering Wally Pryor  
'Voice of the Longhorns' passes away at 86.

Bill Little Commentary

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## Bill Little, Texas Media Relations

For many, of an era that has passed, what will they will remember most about Wally Pryor will be a voice over the public address system -- somewhere, some place. More significant, however, was the man behind the microphone.

Because, you see, as good as he was at speaking in public, it was with his heart that he spoke the loudest.

The record says that Wally was 86 years old when he died, troubled by a long battle with memory loss and the ravages of aging. But we never really knew whether that was true. Wally, you see, was a "leap year" baby, born on February 29. So he could only celebrate his birthday every four years. Perhaps that was the reason, during his many active years in Austin and around The University, that he seemed so forever young. Once, at a UT men's basketball game in the early 1990s, the crowd serenaded Wally as he celebrated his "16th" birthday. It was, of course, on February 29.

His long association with football at what was then known as Texas Memorial Stadium began in the late 1950s, soon after the arrival for the 1957 season of an energetic new football coach named Darrell Royal. Even before that, however, Wally was busy volunteering his time, working for UT Athletics. He had been a swimming letterman in the late 1940s, and in the early part of the 1950s, he helped organized an event known as the Aqua Carnival at UT. He soon became the number one ambassador for all things Texas, but always in a behind-the-scenes role.

From his place in the production studios at KTBC-TV, he masterminded the original format of Royal's weekly TV show. It was Wally who first used "Wabash Cannon Ball" as the show's theme, creating an icon for the Longhorn Band that would become synonymous with Royal and the Show Band of the Southwest throughout his head-coaching career from 1957-76.

While his brother, Cactus Pryor, became famous as a humorist and a popular after dinner speaker throughout the country, Wally's gifts were focused primarily on Austin and The University. When the first meeting of a committee to establish the Longhorn Hall of Honor was held in 1957, Wally was there. When the Texas Exes needed video for their Distinguished Alumnus Awards, Wally teamed with another local talent, Gordon Wilkison, to create the films.

When the Longhorn football banquet celebrated National Championships in 1963, 1969 and 1970, it was Wally who produced it. And it would be Wally's voice you heard with special announcements -- always, always off stage, away from the limelight.

For years, if there was a charity event, a rodeo, a fund raiser, or just a community celebration in or around the Capital City, Wally was at the microphone. Most of all, Wally would forever be linked as the voice of the Longhorns when it came to the football stadium or the basketball gymnasium. If there was a game, there was Wally.

In 1977, he made the transition with the Longhorns from historic Gregory Gymnasium, where Wally once swam as a fine water polo player in the pool beyond the stage, to the Special Events Center (now known as the Frank C. Erwin Center). He was courtside in 1979 when Abe Lemons confronted Arkansas' Eddie Sutton on the court at halftime of a crucial Southwest Conference game. He playfully announced the arrival of UT's first basketball dance

team, known as the "Longhorn Luvs." In his own way, he was every bit the showman that Cactus was, only as far as Wally was concerned, he was never the star.

He kept that place for the players and the coaches whose story he told.

When [Jody Conradt](#) was first getting the UT women's program on a roll toward its 1986 National Championship season, Wally would retire after the game to the Fast Break Club, where the "Lady Longhorns" as they were called at the time would join adoring fans. Around Christmas time, Wally would coax the players on stage for a rousing basketball slanted take off on "The 12 Days of Christmas." Complete with Santa hats, he had a hoops line for each verse such as "Five SWC Championship rings."

Still his greatest legacy was the public address at the stadium, along with his relationship as the announcer for the Longhorn Band. For 40 years, he manned the mike, covering an era from Royal to [Ricky Williams](#). It was a different time in sports, a time before structured scripts dictated every moment in the public address booth. Wally loved freelancing, and in a space where he had a captive audience of 65,000 people, he owned the microphone.

There, he could tell his friend, Hondo Crouch, that he needed to pick up his grandmother at some local drinking establishment, or delight the crowd with his weekly announcement of the score from tiny Slippery Rock College in Pennsylvania. In the early 1960s, when there appeared to be a confrontation between the Silver Spurs who were walking Bevo around the track into the midst of the Texas A&M yell leaders, Wally announced in his usual dead-pan style, "That's a cow, Aggies."

Most famous, of course, was his effort at crowd control after Texas' upset of nationally-ranked Houston in 1990. On one of the rare occasions where Texas fans actually were moved to rush the field, a group surrounded one of the goal posts as the game ended, with one appearing to climb up the standard. It was then that Wally famously uttered, "Get that idiot off the goal post!"

By the end of that decade, however, things had begun to change. Marketing and a search for new revenue sources changed Wally's role, and the structure soon became frustrating. Electronic scoreboards and ribbon boards brought the scores into the stadium that Wally had delighted in announcing. Sometimes, with an unintentional gaff included.

Basketball PA announcing at most games had followed the lead of the NBA, with shouting, bells and whistles. Wally by then had realized that his folksy style didn't fit. After the 1999 season, with the changing times at the stadium, it had become harder and harder for Wally to enjoy. With the end of the 20th century, the guy who had been involved in UT Athletics for almost half of it, decided it was time to leave.

Veteran Austin radio personality Bob Cole was asked to handle the announcing with the Longhorn Band, and for the last 14 seasons has been a part of the PA presentation at Longhorns home games.

Alzheimer's disease robbed both Wally and Cactus of memories of current events before Cactus died in 2011 and Wally's passing on Saturday. But for those whose lives they touched, they gave us all something to treasure.

In Cactus' case, it was that of a legendary pioneer in broadcasting and public speaking. Wally, however, leaves with something else.

He touched a part of us that nurtured the soul from our youth to the gray hair and measured step that comes with the turning of the years. Wally was unique. He was never perfect, and he could laugh at himself. In fact, you never laughed at Wally, you laughed with him. Most of all, he was fun. We will remember the kisses on the cheek and the hugs for the pretty girls, the handshakes and smiles for the guys.

He was a part of the tapestry of UT Athletics -- a voice now silenced, but a life well lived.

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